

Message Text

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FOLLOWING REPEAT BIEUT 9597 ACTION SECSTATE INFO AMMAN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 9597

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, LE

SUBJECT: NATIONAL CHARTER COMES UNDER INCREASING SCRUTINY

REF: (A) BEIRUT 9292; (B) BEIRUT 9571

1. PROMINENT FIGURES BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT
HAVE EXPRESSED OPINIONS RECENTLY ON THE VIABILITY OF THE NATIONAL
CHARTER. ITS DELICATE CONFESSIOAL BALANCE, ESSENTIALLY
UNCHANGED SINCE 1943, IS UNDER INCREASING ATTACK. THE COMMENTS
OF PRIMIN KARAME URGING ITS ALTERATION ARE REPORTED IN REF B.
THE EARLIER REMARKS OPPOSING ALTERATION BY TONY FRANGIE, THE
PRESIDENT'S SON, ARE IN REF A. OTHER SIGNIFICANT VIEWS FOLLOW
BELOW:

-- DECLARATION OF THE CATHOLIC PATRIARCHS AND BISHOPS: MEETING
FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE RECENT TROUBLES, LEBANON'S LEADING
MARONITE AND OTHER CATHOLIC PRELATES ISSUED A STATEMENT JULY 22
THAT WAS WIDELY HAILED FOR ITS EVEN-HANDEDNESS IN BLAMING BOTH
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THE "ADVENTUROUSLY REVOLUTIONARY LEFT" AND THE "TENACISOULY
REACTIONARY RIGHT" FOR THE CIVIL STRIFE. EVEN THE SUNNI MUFTI
LATER PRAISED THE DECLARATION. HOWEVER, ONE IDEA ON WHICH THE
CATHOLIC PRELATES WERE NOT DISPOSED TO COMPROMISE WAS THE

SUGGESTION THAT THE NATIONAL CHARTER SHOULD BE SCRAPPED. THEY STRONGLY OPPOSED THIS PROPOSAL, ASKING RHETORICALLY: "IS NOT OUR LEBANESE FORMULA STILL A MODEL FOR ALL COUNTRIES OF MULTIPLE RELIGIONS?"

-- KAMAL JUMBLATT: THE DRUZE LEADER OF THE LEFTIST PSP, KAMAL JUMBLATT, DELIVERED HIMSELF OF A WIDE RANGE OF VIEWS IN AN INTERVIEW WITH "AS SAFIR" PUBLISHED JULY 28. AMONG OTHER THINGS, HE STRESSED THAT CONFESSIONALISM SHOULD BE ELIMINATED FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTORAL SYSTEM. HE CHARGED THAT CHRISTIAN RIGHTISTS HOPE TO TRANSFORM LEBANON INTO A CHRISTIAN STATE, WHICH HE CLAIMED VIOLATED THE NATION'S HISTORIC FORMULA OF EQUAL STATUS FOR ALL GROUPS. JUMBLATT REFERRED IN THIS INTERVIEW TO BOTH HIS STATUS AS A DRUZE AND HIS POSITION AS A LEFTIST LEADER, DRAWING ON BOTH IN A SOMEWHAT CONTRADICTORY FASHION TO CRITICIZE CONFESSIONALISM AS CURRENTLY PRACTICED IN LEBANON.

-- CAMILLE CHAMOUN: INTMIN CAMILLE CHAMOUN WAS QUOTED IN RIGHTIST "AL HAYAT" JULY 28 AS STATING THAT A CHANGE OF THE NATIONAL CHARTER WOULD SERIOUSLY SPLIT THE COUNTRY.

2. COMMENTS:

-- IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THE RECENT CIVIL STRIFE HAS NARROWED DOWN TO A CONTROVERSY OVER THE NATIONAL CHARTER, WHICH ORIGINALLY COMBINED LEBANESE INDEPENDENCE, CHRISTIAN PRE-EMINENCE, AND AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT LEBANON IS AN ARAB STATE. THE VARIOUS ISSUES RAISED IN THE RECENT DISORDERS-- PHALANGIST NATIONALISM VS. THE PALESTINIANS, LEBANESE CONFESSIONAL HOSTILITY, AND SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INJUSTICE-- CAN ALL BE VIEWED AS FACETS OF THE WAY THE NATIONAL CHARTER HAS WORKED ITSELF OUT OVER THE PAST THIRTY YEARS. WE EXPECT TO SEE A LOT MORE DEBATE ABOUT THE CHARTER IN THE COMING MONTHS.

GODLEY UNQTE SISCO

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